ADELANTE:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LIBRARY SERVICE TO THE SPANISH-SPEAKING



THE CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY TASK FORCE ON SERVING SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

A COMPONENT OF THE PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE PROGRAM

Introduction

This document was created as a result of the California State Library's "Service to Immigrant Populations Program." The goal is to provide practical information for public libraries and library staff who wish to deliver more effective service to the Spanish-speaking community. Much of the information builds on the concepts developed by the California State Library in programs funded by the federal Library Services and Construction Act to help libraries improve the quality of library services to California's growing multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual communities.

The State Library designed the Immigrant Program in response to the impact immigration to California, from Latin America and Asia in particular, has had on the makeup of the population of the state. In 1988 alone, approximately 30 percent of all immigrants to the United States (188,696 of the total 643,025) took up residence in California, and about 90 percent of those immigrants came from Mexico, Central/South America and Asia. Over 30 percent of the 4.8 million elementary and secondary level students in California come from non-English speaking homes.

Recent research (Public Library Services for Immigrant Populations in California and Information Gatekeepers in California's Ethnic Communities) identifies the most effective methods public libraries can use to respond to the needs of immigrant populations. These are: becoming knowledgeable about the characteristics of specific immigrant populations; networking with organizations and agencies that serve the specific immigrant populations; providing materials in both the native language of the specific immigrant population and in English; and making the specific immigrant population aware of the services available from the public library.

In fiscal year 1991/92, grants for service to Spanish-speaking immigrant populations were awarded to 50 California public library sites. Funds were earmarked for the purchase of materials which provide assistance in the process of adaptation to the United States (e.g., learn English, find employment or housing, respond to medical, legal or household repair concerns). Additional grants were awarded for service to the Spanish-speaking in fiscal year 1993/94 to 38 library sites as part of the third year of Immigrant Program grants.

Research and planning for these programs revealed a need for additional information on how to provide service to the Spanish-speaking. Where information existed, it was often not current, or was remiss in addressing certain areas related to restructuring library services. In response to that need, the California State Library created a task force to make recommendations based on libraries' experiences in trying to provide more effective service to the Spanish-speaking in their community. Task force members were chosen based on their own library expertise in serving the Spanish-speaking, as well as their experience as participants in the Immigrant Program.

A wide variety of topics is covered in these recommendations: needs assessment and community analysis; comunity connections; access; materials and collection development; personnel and staff development; services and programs; marketing and awareness; funding; political concerns; and evaluation.

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1. Needs Assessment and Community Analysis

It is essential to develop a profile of the Spanish-speaking community the library intends to serve for a variety of reasons. Because library resources are limited, services need to be focused and significant while not duplicating the efforts of other community agencies. A meaningful profile of the community will include the following information: gender, age level, educational training, language/literacy skills, country of origin, socioeconomic history, length of residence in the United States, and what brought them to the community.

Needs assessment in the Spanish-speaking community is the first step in developing the community's sense of "ownership" of the library. By making personal contact with people, staff can involve them in planning for the library's future. Their sense of "ownership" comes from being part of the planning process.

Staff will discover whether the community comes from a rural or urban tradition, whether they are political and/or economic refugees/immigrants, university students/professionals or agricultural workers, family wage earners or single persons, recent immigrants or longstanding community members, bilingual speakers or monolingual Spanish speakers. Knowing the country of origin is important to understanding the information needs of the community as the library develops the Spanish language collection to reflect their interests and their cultural history. Staff may also discover that members of the Spanish-speaking community have limited or different library experiences.

Also integral to the needs assessment process is contacting other community agencies serving the same population group the library is targeting. This uncovers the focus and strengths of existing programs, helping to define exactly what role the library can play in providing for the information needs of the Spanish-speaking population. Cooperative efforts will cultivate relationships with those agencies through the personal contacts made with fellow agency staff. The library's position in the community will be enhanced while staff works to create a dynamic, responsive and effective library service program.

Recommendations

- Determine the Spanish-speaking community's profile. Compile recent demographics from Census and school district data. Interview community leaders about the nationalities of the Spanish-speaking population in the community. Become aware of their language and cultural needs, and why language and cultural preservation are important.
- Assess and understand the values of the Spanish-speaking community through personal interviews and direct contact with the community. Learn how a person's level of acculturation impacts his/her language and cultural needs.
- Work to create a library that mirrors the library's service area population. Design a library budget with spending and staffing that directly reflects the library's community profile.

2. Community Connections

The library needs to establish a network of contacts within the Spanish-speaking community by developing working relationships with key individuals and groups which represent the community. The key individuals and groups can be identified through direct contact with library users, schools, churches or local businesses. The library should actively involve these community

contacts in collection development, programming, and general services to ensure the community's information needs are being served.

The relationships the library builds with key persons or groups will result in mutual benefit for the library and community. The library must learn about the community's cultural characteristics and specific information needs. In doing so, the library also sends a message of caring and can readily gauge how it is serving the community. Through these contacts, the library generates visibility, credibility and support from the community. In a challenging economic environment, the contacts the library maintains with the community can impact the level and quality of library services.

Recommendations

- Work with local community groups to form partnerships. Make a commitment to develop a continuing, active and long-term relationship with the community.
- Establish an information and referral list by researching and including agencies and organizations that provide services the library does not.
- Identify community leaders and actively involve them in determining how the library can better serve Spanish-speaking patrons. Develop on-going relationships with community leaders and rely on them to help promote the library.
- Connect with local churches and church groups. Over 75 percent of the Spanish-speaking community are Catholic and religion plays an important role in their lives.
- All staff members need to become known in the community. Walk around, shop, buy gas, eat lunch, talk to business owners. This is especially important when staff works but does not live in the community the library serves. It is also important for all staff to become known in the community because different staff members have entré into different segments of the community.
- Connect with community leaders. They can provide information about the Spanish-speaking community's information needs, values, and ways to reach them.
- Network with local offices of federal and state government agencies and local service agencies that work with the target community.
- Recruit bicultural volunteers as library "ambassadors" to help with fundraising, programming and speaking opportunities.

3. Access

The delivery of Spanish language library services includes planning for and providing access to resources. This includes providing access to both collections and library facilities. It is all too easy to simply acknowledge the need for a Spanish-language collection, set one up somewhere in the library (maybe in the back), watch and evaluate the collection and its usage or lack of usage for a few months or years, and come to the conclusion that maybe there was less need than staff thought, and move on to other tasks.

The public library exists to provide access to informational, recreational and educational resources. Access issues (such as creating a welcoming environment, the library's location and

physical building, providing customer service, cataloging and collection location, electronic access, hours, and signage) need to be addressed. Regardless of the budget or size of the collection, the more effort put forth towards providing access, the more useful and valuable the library will be to the community.

Recommendations

- Realize that the library's location in the community is critical. Is it within walking distance of local schools? Is the library served by public transportation? Is the library's neighborhood considered safe? Does the Spanish-speaking population know where the library is located? Although the library's location can't be changed, staff's awareness of any obstacles that location may create and active efforts to overcome them are essential.
- Use bilingual signage inside and outside the library, and with the collection. Display a "welcome" sign at the entrance in Spanish.
- Be sure the collection is easy to find, especially if it's a small collection. Locate the collection in a central area visible upon entry to the library, or in an area that is within pointing distance from the circulation desk.
- Create a welcoming environment in the library with bright colors, music, cultural displays, bilingual signage, and other visual cues. Use multicultural posters (e.g., American Library Association or California State Library Partnerships for Change posters) at entrances and key areas of the library. If the library has security guards, be sure they're aware of the need to create a welcoming and safe, not threatening, environment.
- Don't make people change who they are to come into the library. The library should be a reflection of the people it serves--not the other way around.
- Provide comfortable seating for reading near the Spanish-language collection, and be sure the collection does not look neglected. Many Spanish-speaking patrons prefer to read materials in the library rather than take them home.
- Promote the availability of library meeting rooms to Latino community groups. Create a bilingual flyer describing how to reserve and use the library for meetings and distribute it to Latino organizations.

4. Materials/Collection Development

The acquisition of Spanish language materials is a challenging pursuit for librarians in the United States. An open mind and creative spirit are needed from the outset because this pursuit involves a publishing industry that is different from the publishing traditions most familiar to U.S. librarians. Those traditions and norms include: jobbers a la Baker and Taylor, format choices (paperbacks or hardbacks), library bindings, book reviews, moderate costs, availability and access to materials in all subject areas, CIP, etc.

There is a very different reality to deal with in the process of acquiring Spanish language materials for the library collection. There are no jobbers. Rather, there is a rainbow of vendors that has evolved to fulfill library needs. However, they may operate in a definite cultural fashion, not the reserved approach that typifies business in the U.S. In lieu of utilizing jobbers, librarians

will need to utilize alternative methods for selection, including local purchasing trips to vendor stores, selecting materials at book fairs, and even trying out materials on-approval.

Include materials for children and young adults in the library's Spanish language collection. There are vendors that tailor their inventory for a particular age level and/or format, i.e., adult music, children's books, adult reference titles, children's recorded books, etc. Many Young Adult titles will be titles translated from English with a potential audience among Spanish-speaking adults as well as teenagers. Children who are literate in Spanish due to a bilingual school curriculum or who have just moved to the United States will need all the homework support they can get. This includes leisure reading as well as non-fiction materials.

Be wary of giving up selection to the vendor, and utilize this method as a last resort. Vendors do not have the same goals as librarians to provide access to many diverse ideas through a variety of publications. Vendors, too, have biases in their inventory. Many pride themselves on having "good" literature, others with promoting democracy (as opposed to socialism), and still others don't sell any reference materials because of their belief that no one will purchase them. Becoming dependent on a single vendor will limit the library's scope because the collection will begin to reflect the inventory of that vendor instead of the reading and information needs of patrons.

Publishing and publications in Spanish-speaking countries are primarily designed for a home consumer market. As a rule, most titles will be in a paperback format, the binding is usually done with gluing, and the paper is a rough pulp. These publications were never meant for the multiple use handling that occurs in public libraries; however, Spanish-speaking patrons know and accept the publishing standards of their own countries. Learn to accept the same realities and look to include rather than exclude materials based on their physical traits.

Even though the conveniences of U.S. library acquisitions are not available, Spanish language readers deserve the same standards in collection development that are exercised in other areas of library materials selection. Compromising on formats and methods should not mean that basic selection criteria is abandoned. Content should be as current as possible and accurate, particularly in areas of medical, legal and scientific information. Make a conscious effort to include various formats and reading levels because Spanish-speaking library users have a wide range of educational experiences, and literacy levels.

Solicit input from patrons regarding their reading interests and information needs. Network among colleagues and professionals in local community agencies to select materials based on current and validated input. Once the materials have been acquired, treat them with the same criteria given to English language materials with respect to equal access. Providing full cataloging for each item, particularly in the current environment of on-line public catalogs, will provide a richer library experience for Spanish-speaking patrons because it enables them to access more library materials.

- Provide materials that the Spanish-speaking community and patrons want, not just what staff think they want.
- Network with colleagues and community agencies to get help with materials selection.
- Use electronic sources (e.g., list services and specialized data bases available on the Internet) to supplement collection development.

- Develop relationships with vendors, and let them know what the library needs. Ask vendors for discounts and make deals. Sometimes prices are negotiable, especially on more expensive items.
- Shop around. Different vendors frequently offer the same titles at different prices.
- Expect to work with vendors in different ways, instead of the traditional Baker and Taylor approach.
- Keep in mind in selecting materials the topics the Task Force felt were essential to have in Spanish as well as English, e.g.:
 - English-as-a-Second-Language materials in a variety of formats
 - Dictionaries, encyclopedias and almanacs
 - Literacy materials
 - Physician's Desk Reference
 - Automotive repair manuals
 - Home repair manuals
 - Cooking and nutrition
 - Health and beauty, exercise and physical fitness
 - Motivation and self-esteem
 - Citizenship
 - Histories of California, Mexico, Latin America and U.S.
 - Computing and computer software in Spanish
 - Computer translating program
 - Business and career development
 - Legal rights and responsibilities
 - Sex education, pregnancy, childbirth, parenting and child care
 - Astrology, and the occult
 - How-to materials

5. Personnel and Staff Development

An internal climate of acceptance of diverse cultural traditions is essential to providing effective customer service. A single staff member, working alone to change and improve service, can do little. The library needs to change the way it provides service by looking at staff attitudes and awareness. Staff members need to understand and embrace both the need for change and the value of service to the entire community. Staff training programs such as cultural awareness workshops and Spanish-language classes can often help break down cultural barriers and create an environment that promotes providing new and better service to everyone.

- Provide cultural diversity training and cultural awareness experiences to all library staff. Orient staff about the Spanish-speaking community's culture via training, attendance at Latino special events, or with written materials.
- Communicate to staff the importance of greeting patrons, smiling, being friendly and culturally sensitive.
- Realize that staff need to think about changing the way they see and do things. Help staff recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and pursue their own personal development opportunities to get the skills they need to better serve all patrons.

• Actively recruit bilingual and bicultural staff at all levels. Spanish-speaking patrons feel more comfortable in the library when they can be served by staff reflective of them.

6. Services and Programs

Libraries should provide a variety of services and programs which are of interest to the Spanish-speaking community, as individuals or in groups. Because the family is so highly valued in the Spanish-speaking community, it is very important to provide library services and programs that are family oriented. Programs for children and young adults can also help young people appreciate their cultural heritage and bring the Latino community together. Programs should cover a wide range of topics to meet the informational, educational, and recreational needs and interests of people in the Spanish-speaking community (e.g., Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, bilingual tours and orientation for ESL classes, parenting classes, summer reading programs for kids, open houses, Family Night, etc.).

- Encourage staff to participate in the life of the community by attending and being a part of local events such as community fairs, Latino activities, and civic forums.
- Coordinate library services with other local agencies in the community to provide the public with comprehensive methods for meeting their information needs. Information and Referral should be developed locally and should be staffed with bilingual-bicultural personnel.
- Provide materials, services, and programs for the Spanish-speaking at alternative sites within the community (community centers, migrant camps, senior centers, etc.) as part of a regular program for extending services.
- Design and provide programming for Spanish-speaking children that encourages them to bring their parents and other family members to the library.
- Provide Spanish-language and bilingual story hours for Spanish-speaking children.
- Provide cultural programming--music, dance, poetry readings and art exhibits--in the library during appropriate holidays.
- Make library meeting space available to Latino groups and individuals within the community.
- Develop programs and services in consultation with members of the community.
- Co-sponsor programming with a Latino community group, Spanish-language media or an educational institution (e.g., high school, community college or adult school).
- Provide appropriate services and programs for the disabled in the Spanish-speaking community.
- Include services to the Spanish-speaking when providing services to the institutionalized, the incarcerated, or those otherwise unable to obtain services at the library site.

7. Marketing and Awareness

The library must market its products and services to attract potential users in a variety of ways. Marketing and promoting the library needs to be a major component of all libraries' efforts to reach their communities. Creating a high profile in the community is the key to increasing usage. In many cases, the library will be targeting potential patrons who are not familiar with the American concept of a public library. Libraries and librarians need to sell the library's value and importance to everyone in the community. The library will probably have to work twice as hard to market its services to people with limited or different library experience.

Community members are entitled to know about and to participate in the public library, developing, refining and advocating the role of that library in their community. This proactive role can develop as a result of being informed about public library services in this country and how they are supported.

- Actively promote library card ownership and borrowing. Public library service and the concept of the public lending library are new to many recent Spanish-speaking immigrants. Be sure library card applications and other library information are provided in Spanish as well as English.
- · Offer library tours and orientations in Spanish.
- Demonstrate and promote the role and value of libraries whenever an opportunity is available.
- Make sure the library is visible in the community. Attend community meetings. Use posters, banners, displays and flyers to create a library presence in the Spanish-speaking community.
- Promote the library's services and programs through local schools, parents' groups, and ESL classes.
- Establish relationships with people in the Spanish-language media and work to get public service announcements aired. Provide a weekly column, calendar or articles about library services and materials for immigrants. Try to get on interview programs to talk about library resources and services and be sure to bring along a Spanish-speaking patron whom the library has helped.
- Have a library booth at local community fairs and ethnic festivals. Distribute bilingual library card applications and bibliographies of Spanish-language resources.
- Put bilingual messages about hours, services and programming on the library's answering machine.
- Contact local businesses to get incentives (e.g., coupons for free or discounted food, books, or entertainment) to bring people into the library.
- Produce premiums or give-aways--bookbags, pens, rulers, etc.--with appropriate ethnic art or the library's name and logo.
- Use doorhangers to promote library programming or services. Enlist local service organizations to help distribute them door-to-door.

- Promote the library's resources and services out in the community with flyers, posters and bibliographies placed in agencies and businesses that serve the Spanish-speaking population.
- Be aware of the potentially threatening character that institutional settings (police station, city hall, and even the library) can have for many recent immigrants. Work to overcome the barriers that institutional settings can create.

8. Funding

Ideally, the percentage of the materials budget allocated to Spanish language materials should be equal to the percentage of Spanish-speaking people in the library's service area. This ideal is seldom realized. By allocating a portion of the annual materials budget for Spanish-language materials, the library demonstrates administrative buy-in to serving the Spanish-speaking community.

When a library includes serving the Spanish-speaking community in its mission, it becomes easier to work toward establishing a collection that reflects the community. Staff responsible for selecting Spanish language materials need to be advocates for more funding, spend funds carefully, and be creative.

Recommendations

- Realize that developing service to the Spanish-speaking community requires administrative buyin. Be an advocate for more equitable service and materials for everyone in the community.
- Allocate a specific percentage of the library's annual materials budget for Spanish-language materials. The percentage of the budget allocated should ultimately reflect the demographics of the community. For example, if 20 percent of the population is Spanish speaking, 20 percent of the materials budget should be allocated to Spanish materials.
- Actively seek funding from partnerships or co-sponsorships with private or public organizations.
- Do not use grant funding to replace or decrease the library's annual allocation for Spanishlanguage materials and programming.
- Do not rely on grant sources solely to fund Spanish-language programs and services.
- Investigate other sources of funding for expanding or experimenting with innovative techniques.
- Provide pay incentives for bilingual skills when recruiting staff.

9. Political Concerns

Whenever a library begins a new program that promises to bring change, it enters the "political arena." Creating a library that truly reflects the needs of the library's service area population often requires reallocating resources, and other changes. Some of these changes may not be understood. Others may not be popular or welcome. Building support for any kind of change can create a politically challenging environment that staff must learn to navigate.

Recommendations

- Realize that cutting edge changes--such as enhancing service to Spanish-speaking patrons--challenge library traditions.
- Make sure that staff involved in pursuing effective service to the Spanish-speaking community realize they are agents of change and must understand that this process of change is on-going and long-term.
- Learn to sell the benefits of redesigning library services and library budgets to reflect the service area population.
- Encourage community advocacy. Identify community leaders and patrons who support the library, and encourage them to become advocates for library services for Spanish-speaking patrons. Ask them to write letters, come to budget hearings, and express their support in other ways.
- Realize that the library director's buy-in and commitment are crucial to changing the library in any significant way. Identify what's in it for the director, and sell him/her on the need for change.
- Include the library's commission, board and Friends group in planning programs and services.
- Overcome institutional barriers by sharing the "strokes" with everyone who works in the library. Be aware that changing how the library serves Spanish-speaking patrons requires everyone's understanding, support and cooperation.
- Be aware that when library funding is limited or shrinking, any change impacts morale. People have trouble working smarter or harder when they lack job security.
- Recognize that the funding environment for libraries is changing. Libraries--and librarians--need to sell the library's value and importance to **everyone** in the community.

10. Evaluation

Many libraries lack the evaluation opportunities, processes and tools they need to determine how the community sees the library. Some libraries devote considerable resources to serving new populations, but never know whether the impact the library desired is the impact it achieved. Tracking and evaluation are necessary because they provide understanding about what is effective and what is not, what the library needs more of and what it needs less of, to make service to the Spanish-speaking community effective. By knowing which activities produce results, the library will be able to eliminate the activities that aren't effective.

In the Report Card on Public Library Services to the Latino Community (a REFORMA Project), data was collected from Latino library professionals and users, and Latino community leaders to measure library performance. One key finding: "Some public libraries have successfully rallied the support of local leadership, state and national agencies and have created the appropriate internal conditions to provide outstanding library services to the Latino community." But overall, the Report Card continues, "Public libraries continue to offer traditional services only to the traditional population, using traditional methods to measure those services; few libraries risk experimenting with unusual, innovative and challenging strategies."

- When planning services and programs for the Spanish-speaking community, be sure to set goals and measurable objectives to facilitate evaluation of the program later.
- Measure circulation data to help monitor and measure collection activity. Try to implement a system for tracking in-library use of non-circulating materials.
- Establish innovative ways to measure effectiveness of service. Ask for testimonials from Spanish-speaking patrons. Create a bilingual customer satisfaction questionnaire and give it to Spanish-speaking patrons to complete. Conduct exit interviews in Spanish after events or programs that target the Spanish-speaking community.
- Go beyond tracking traditional measures (circulation data, patrons per day) to determine the effectiveness of service. How did patrons use the information they obtained? How did library staff grow and change as a result of serving Spanish-speaking patrons? How did the library benefit from serving the Spanish-speaking community? Are there new volunteers, new advocates for the library? What was the fiscal impact? Are there new partners, resources, donors or other sources of funding as a result of serving the Spanish-speaking community?
- Use focus groups to find out what Spanish-speaking patrons think about the library's collection, programs, and signage. Although this technique is not scientific, it can provide lots of valuable information.
- Use systematic observation to gather information. How many Spanish-speaking people attend programs and events? How do Spanish-speaking patrons respond to the expanded collection, bilingual signage, and staff? Make notes about staff's observations and include those observations in evaluating library service.
- Include community input, both formal and informal, in evaluating library programs and services to the Spanish-speaking community. Make this input an integral part of the library's overall evaluation.

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